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The covenant of peace: A personal witness

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THE COVENANT OF PEACE

a personal witness by MAURICE FRIEDMAN

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The mountains may depart and the hills be removed
But my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
And my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
Says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

Deutero-Isaiah

WE LIVE in an age of compounded crises, an age of hot and cold war and the constant threat of total annihilation by the weapons that we ourselves have perfected. It is an age more and more bereft of authentic human existence, and even the image of such existence increasingly deserts us. Those who cannot accept the compromises of our age run to the extremes: the yogi and the commissar, the saint and the political actionist. The one prayer which seems least likely to be answered, the prayer we have almost ceased to pray, is *Dona nobis pacem*, "Give us peace." War, cold war, threatened war, future war, has become the very atmosphere in which we live, a total element so pervasive and so enveloping as to numb our very sensibility to the abyss which promises to engulf us.

In our age three great figures have emerged, each of whom in his way is a peacemaker: Mohandas Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, and Martin Buber. Each in his own way and on his own ground: Gandhi, who found the meeting point of religion and politics in *satyagraha*, a laying hold of the truth, or "soul force," which proved effective in liberating India as it may also prove effective in liberating the Negro communities of the South; Schweitzer, whose Christian love has expressed itself in a practical "reverence for

life" and whose concern for all of life extends from befriending a pelican to repeated pleas for outlawing nuclear weapons; Martin Buber, who has found in the Biblical Covenant a base for real meeting between peoples and real reconciliation between conflicting claims. Many, who like myself hold Gandhi and Schweitzer in reverence, turn nonetheless to Martin Buber and to the dialogue which meets others and holds its ground when it meets them, for the road to peace in the modern world.

PACIFISM AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Before I found my way to Buber, I moved through a succession of images of man in which Gandhi and St. Francis occupied important and lasting places. In my decision to be a conscientious objector, however, it was not so much an image of man, as a rational analysis of the moral and social problems involved that played the dominant part.

I did not derive my morality and my social consciousness from the war. Far from it! I was all too moral even before then; chock full of a Sunday-School morality of peace, brotherhood, justice—universal, self-evident, self-validating values, inculcated in me by liberal Judaism perhaps, but needing no religious base on which to stand. These values, combined with the anti-militaristic slant of social studies in the Nineteen-Thirties, gave me an active social conscience which applied itself to problems of social reform and international relations. It gave me, too, a strong feeling for peace and a keen hatred of war. But it did not give me the moral foundation for making a real value decision when I found myself in a situation where I felt as if I had to choose between my concern for social reform, on the one hand, and my feeling for peace, on the other. It was only then that I came to understand morality from within, for it was only then that I faced the basic problem of how I discover what I ought to do in a concrete situation that demands basic decision and response. Only after I had worked through to some answer to this problem could I return to tackle the tormenting conflict of values that I experienced when I juxtaposed my hatred of the Nazis and everything they stood for with my hatred for war.

Most important for me then was a growing conviction that only good means can lead to good ends. I was influenced by Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means* here. But also by Tolstoi—that moment when Prince André lies on the ground on the battlefield and looks up at the patch of blue sky. And Dostoevsky: his positive evaluation of suffering called in question, for me, the whole American “way of life,”—baseball and bridge games, comfort and entertainment, and helped to convince me that if America really stood for democracy in a positive way, this attitude would build the future even under a Nazi conqueror, whereas an America that stood for nothing would succumb to militarism even if it were victorious in war. Socialism led me to radical criticism of much that lay behind our drive to war; Gandhi's nonviolent direct action gave me hope of the possibilities of a people withholding even its negative consent from the conqueror. But above all, from the time when I had studied the League and International Relations in high school through all my studies of history, political science, and economics at Harvard, everything combined to teach me that balance of power was not the way to peace. The “war to end wars” only sowed the seeds for future wars, the war to “make the world safe for democracy” helped bring on totalitarianism, and this new war to destroy totalitarianism would only fasten on our country the very militarism that I feared while laying the groundwork for future conflict. I believed these things and still I hoped: with what might seem sublime inconsistency I became chairman of the Harvard Postwar Problems Council at the very time that these reasons led me to register as a “C.O.”

Years later I found “high-level” theoretical support for this position in John Dewey's “means-ends continuum”—a theory of valuation that emphasizes the pragmatic consequences of our acts in contrast to our intellectual abstractions concerning them. The fact that we want this war to end war does not mean that the means we use will produce this end; for along with the end we have in mind may come six or a dozen equally important consequences which we do *not* have in mind—consequences that may outweigh and nullify the desired effect. The ordinary notion that the end justifies the means is not only a moral concept, namely, that it is

all right to serve a good cause with evil ends because of the greater good accomplished "in the end." It is also a "practical" notion cherished by "practical men," namely, that this is the way to get things done. The belief that the means must correspond to the end, conversely, is not only a moral, but a practical one. It questions whether that end will, in fact, be reached by any means that are not like it. The difference between these two conceptions of the practical is caused in part by the fact that "practical" men regularly define their own prejudices and assumptions as practical, the objections to them on the part of other men as "idealistic." But it is also caused by the fact that the pacifist has a more basic conception of the end than other men. He is not just trying to reach an "end in view" that is just a means to another end, and in this sense he parts company from Dewey's instrumentalism. He is concerned about "the good"—the good within men, the good between men, the happiness and welfare of all men,—and he knows that whatever other things may be accomplished by bad means, they will not lead to the good.

For a while I read nothing, so I might be sure to make up my own mind, and then I read everything I could get my hands on. I read all about the theory of choosing the "lesser evil," Reinhold Niebuhr's "moral man in immoral society," the hypothetical case in which someone attacked me or my family personally, the question of whether I was allowing somebody else to defend me, even the question of whether it was not "selfish" to hold a view which the majority did not hold. When I told the man at the employment office that I was a C.O., the official asked me, "How long have you held that theory?" "It's not a theory," I replied archly, "it is a conviction." Yet I spun out theories so far that at one point I even tried to work out a system of mathematical probabilities for deciding whether or not to join the American Field Service and do ambulance work in Africa! Would the help I gave the wounded soldiers really be greater, I asked, than my contribution to the war through healing these soldiers so they might return to battle?

Finally, my alternatives seemed to boil down to the unhappy choice between doing nothing—that is, spending (as it turned out) three and a half years in Civilian Public Service camps for con-

scientious objectors largely performing "made work," work manufactured to keep the workers busy—and doing what seemed harmful in itself and in its results—taking part in a war that was likely to produce new conflicts and new wars. The former course seemed more realistic but not a particularly creative one at a time when I, like so many others, burned with a desire to do something positive for peace and social reform. I cannot dignify this with the appellation of a tragic choice, but it was certainly an anguished one for the year and a half before my final decision to become a conscientious objector. And it was a choice between evils, as I felt keenly at that time and came to feel still more keenly during the years of civilian public service that followed.

I said above that the problem of the source of moral value is the basic problem of all moral philosophy. But even this is not true so long as this problem remains merely academic—a category of a course in ethics, a formulation in a treatise of Kant. It is only when I ask, "What ought *I* to do in this situation?"—not what ought *one*, but what ought *I* to do?—that I begin to understand the problem of morality from within. It is my involvement in the situation, my decision, my commitment, my acceptance and seeing through the consequences of this commitment, that are the real stuff of moral decision and not the logical games of professional moral analysts. Morality is not a spiritual ideal hovering mistily above our heads: it is the tension, the link, the real relation between the "is" and "ought"—between what in this situation I can and do do what I ought to do. To answer the question of the morality of war in general and objective terms means to identify oneself with some non-existent universal perspective or corporate entity and to lose the only real perspective for moral judgment and decision: the ground on which I stand and from which I respond to the claim of the situation upon me. It is conceivable to me that here and there a man might place a prophetic demand upon a group faced with a fateful historical decision, but not that any man in our age could presume, like Plato's philosopher king, to hand down from above absolute moral dicta on war.

MYSTICISM AND HUMBLE LOVE

To make a decision means to accept the consequences, and in my case this meant, both literally and figuratively, changing the ground on which I stood. When I went to my first camp for conscientious objectors seventeen years ago, I found there and in the camps and units that followed, new people and new situations that tried my pacifism and forced it to seek deeper roots in cooperative community, personal change, mysticism, comparative religion. When I wrote my statement for the draft board, the only religion I was able to claim was the conviction that the meaning of my life lay in doing good for others and that I was not willing, therefore, to take part in a war that meant denying this purpose. Now my belief that good ends could only be reached through good means deepened from a political to a religious perspective in which the present was no longer seen as the means to the future but as the very reality out of which meaningful human existence and peaceful human relations were to be built. Before I could help others I had to transform myself. Pacifism for me became absolute and a way of life.

Gandhi remained important here, but even more important was the 19th century Hindu saint, or "avatar," Sri Ramakrishna, who worshipped the divine Mother in the prostitute, or his follower Brahmananda, whose mystic devotion tamed the savage jungle tiger. The Sermon on the Mount became more than a Christian social gospel: it was the narrow way of the mystic, and Jesus was the man who had realized union with the divine. The Bhagavad Gita was a poem of war, but from it I extracted *ahimsa*, or non-injury, plus the concern with stages of spiritual development, and the *apûrva*, or subtle causes and effects, which fortified my conviction that only good produces good. The world became one vast spiritual reality in which the refusal of the Buddha to receive insults, the flowing with the Tao of Lao-Tzu, the compassion of Christ, the selfless love and humility of St. Francis were so many wonderful exemplifications of an all-encompassing spiritual unity beside which the immediate goals of my social action days faded into obscurity. Gandhi seemed less meaningful than Sri Rama-

krishna because the latter stood at the divine source from which Gandhi was further removed. Nehru seemed less meaningful than St. Francis praying to be an instrument of God's peace.

O Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master
Grant not so much that I seek
To be consoled, as to console
To be understood, as to understand
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

Along with the image of St. Francis—the image preserved in the “Little Flowers” of St. Francis, but also recreated for our time in Lawrence Housman’s beautiful *Little Plays of St. Francis*—came the image of the Quaker saint James Naylor, an early English Friend of the time of George Fox who was imprisoned and cruelly beaten for his religious views and who, according to legend, left us this testimony as he lay dying on a roadside:

There is a spirit which I feel that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the end. Its hope is to outlive all wrath and contention, and to weary out all exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is of a nature contrary to itself. It sees to the end of all temptations. As it bears no evil in itself, so it conceives none in thoughts to any other. If it be betrayed, it bears it, for its ground and spring is the mercies and forgiveness of God. Its crown is meekness, its life is everlasting love unfeigned; and takes its kingdom with entreaty and not with contention, and keeps it by lowliness of mind. In God alone it can rejoice, though none else regard it, or can own its life. It’s conceived in sorrow, and brought forth without any to

pity it, nor doth it murmur at grief and oppression. It never rejoiceth but through sufferings: for with the world's joy it is murdered. I found it alone, being forsaken. I have fellowship therein with them who lived in dens and desolate places in the earth, who through death obtained this resurrection and eternal holy life.

I found fellowship with Naylor and with Kenneth Boulding, the economist-poet, whose twenty-six *Naylor Sonnets** I committed to memory (years before I knew him) and meditated on during long hours as a night attendant at an institute for the feeble-minded. One of these sonnets fixed itself on my spirit as no mere memorizing could do when, after a long night's imprisonment in a foul-smelling ward for imbeciles, I emerged one morning at six to see the "eastern fire" rise in golden glory and "cleanse the foul night away."

My Lord, Thou art in every breath I take,
And every bite and sup taste firm of Thee.
With buoyant mercy Thou enfoldest me,
And holdest up my foot each step I make.
Thy touch is all around me when I wake,
Thy sound I hear, and by Thy light I see
The world is fresh with Thy divinity
And all Thy creatures flourish for Thy sake.

For I have looked upon a little child
And seen Forgiveness, and have seen the day
With eastern fire cleanse the foul night away;
So cleanest Thou this House I have defiled.
And if I should be merciful, I know
It is Thy mercy, Lord, in overflow.

Each morning when I awake this sonnet is with me, and each evening when I go to sleep St. Francis comes to me with his prayer. Whatever of depression and fear, filth and horror has remained in my memory from my time with the feeble-minded, I have taken with me from there something infinitely precious and ever-present: these images of man that have been my daily companions in all the years since then. These images seemed to point the way "from the inquisitor to the saint." But even when these images first took

* Fellowship Publications, Nyack, N. Y.

hold of me, the "saviour," in Ramakrishna's parable, who looks over the garden wall and returns to tell others about it, remained more appealing to me than the saint who goes down into the garden and leaves the world behind. And in Dostoevsky's great portrait of the Russian *staretz*, or holy man, Father Zossima, I found an image of active love that gave the positive side to the conviction gleaned from Berdyaev's *Dostoevsky* that a compulsory good, imposed upon people in the name of the general welfare, is not good. In Father Zossima pacifism and mysticism fused into one way of life—the way of humble love:

At some thoughts one stands perplexed, especially at the sight of men's sin, and wonders whether one should use force or humble love. Always decide to use humble love. If you resolve on that once for all, you may subdue the whole world. Loving humility is marvellously strong, the strongest of all things and there is nothing else like it.

Father Zossima's humble love is no mere idealism. It is based on the responsibility of each for all, the recognition that the man who stands before you might not have been a sinner had you guarded your own image or given him the physical and spiritual help he needed. And this responsibility in turn is based upon a loving relation to all creation—a mysticism of reciprocity and active love.

Brothers, have no fear of men's sin. Love a man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth. Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love. . . . My brother asked the birds to forgive him; that sounds senseless, but it is right; for all is like an ocean, all is flowing and blending; a touch in one place sets up movement at the other end of the earth.

JUDAISM

When I became a conscientious objector, it seemed to me I did so in consonance with the ideals of Judaism, as I understood them, even though the Jews do not, like the Quakers, have an explicit peace testimony. What is more, I felt that the existence of the Jews down through the centuries as a people without state or military protection in the midst of latently or actively hostile peoples was in itself a testimony to the way of peace, and I was proud of the fact that my last name means "man of peace." On the other hand, though my own grandfather was an adherent of Hasidism—the popular mysticism of East European Jewry, I had never even heard of Jewish mysticism. The Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian mysticism in which I became immersed while working in the institute for the feeble-minded seemed poles apart from the Reform Judaism in which I grew up and in which I was confirmed. Yet the poles were connected by the moral concern which remained with me from my childhood training and which was tested by the world in which I found myself. Nor did I cease to think of myself as a Jew even when nothing in Judaism "spoke to my condition," as the Quakers say, and a good deal in other religions did, including Quakerism itself.

More than this, I was very much aware of the special problems entailed in being that *rara avis*—a Jewish C.O. When I visited my home before I made my final decision, the rabbi of our Temple said to me, "A Jew has no business being a conscientious objector." I became one anyway. I later learned that this rabbi was only expressing a personal prejudice, that the Central Conference of American Rabbis recognized Jewish C.O.'s, and that there was even a Jewish Peace Fellowship, membership in which I now added to that in the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Wider Quaker Fellowship. But I also learned to understand more fully the personal position from which he spoke. Again and again in the years that followed, I was asked the question: "How can a Jew be a pacifist in the face of the Nazi persecution of the Jews?" I knew of this persecution, of course, and I identified myself as a Jew on official forms, if for no other reason, because I identified myself with those persecuted. But I did not think that our waging war

against Germany could in any way reduce the Nazi terrorizing of the Jews. On the other hand, I did not know then what the world soon discovered was going on at that time: that the Nazis were scientifically exterminating six million Jews as if they were insects. When Martin Buber was given the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1953, he pointed out that less than a decade before several thousand Germans killed millions of his people and fellow-believers "in a systematically prepared and executed procedure, the organized cruelty of which cannot be compared with any earlier historical event." "With those who took part in this action in any capacity, I, one of the survivors, have only in a formal sense a common humanity," said Buber.

They have so radically removed themselves from the human sphere, so transposed themselves into a sphere of monstrous inhumanity inaccessible to my power of conception, that not even hatred, much less an overcoming of hatred, was able to arise in me. And what am I that I could here presume to "forgive!"

These words ring true to me. I cannot dismiss this event as an unfortunate detour of history. I cannot as a Jew, I cannot even as a human being, speak of war and the covenant of peace and leave what happened then out of consideration. This does not mean I would have decided differently had I foreseen this. My decision stands, and I stand behind it. Yet no longer in the same way—no longer as an *absolute* pacifist nor as a believer in absolute non-resistance to evil. In thus modifying my attitude, I have not only confronted the tragedy of Jewish history; I have also, I believe, come closer to the tradition of Judaism which only since those years I have come to know in its own terms, particularly in dialogue with the Hebrew Bible.

THE BIBLICAL COVENANT

I entered Judaism through the door of Hasidism, with its ecstasy, its emphasis on inner intention, its joy, and its loving humility. "Love your enemies," Rabbi Michal said to his sons. "And if you should not think that this is serving God, rest assured that this is the highest service." In Hasidism I found an image of an active

love and fervent devotion no longer coupled with self-denial or metaphysical theorizing about unity with the divine. "Every man should have two pockets to use as the occasion demands," said Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditshev. "In his right pocket should be the words, 'For my sake the world was created,' in his left, 'I am dust and ashes.'" Levi Yitzchak, who called God to trial and won, who prayed like a modern Job, "Oh Lord I do not want to know why I suffer but that I suffer for thy sake," remains an image of man for me, as do the Baal-Shem (the founder of Hasidism), Gandhi, St. Francis, and the Buddha. Yet it is to the Bible, the so-called Old Testament, that I finally turned for a new foundation for my own witness for peace.

"My God is a mighty man of war," says a Negro spiritual paraphrasing a Biblical passage. The God of the Hebrew Bible does indeed often appear as a man of war. After Joshua mowed down the Amalekites with the edge of the sword, avenging their wanton destruction of the Israelites on their march through the wilderness, the Lord said to Moses, "I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven," and Moses said, "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." (Exodus 17:13-16) Samuel the prophet took these words literally in a later generation and instructed Saul to destroy utterly the Amalekites, man, woman, child, and beast. When Saul spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, Samuel rejected him as king over Israel on this account alone. When Agag was brought to Samuel, he came to him cheerfully saying, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." But Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women," and he hewed him "in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal." (1 Samuel 15)

One of my friends, an Orthodox rabbi and fellow philosopher, uses the attitude toward the Amalekites as evidence that the Jewish view of evil is not simply the Hasidic one in which evil is the throne of the good and the "evil" urge is passion waiting to be directed to the good. Martin Buber, in contrast, says of this passage: "I have never been able to believe that this is a message of God. . . . Nothing can make me believe in a God who punishes

Saul because he has not murdered his enemy.”* The Hebrew Bible does not, Kierkegaard to the contrary, call for “a suspension of the ethical” in favor of an absolute duty to God. Yet no one can read the stark happenings of the Bible and the intimate mingling of the word of God with the violent conflicts of men without fear and trembling—whether or not one follows my Orthodox friend in his belief or Martin Buber in his doubt.

For all that, the God of the Hebrew Bible *is* not a God of war, and he must not be understood as such. When the shepherd boy David comes before Goliath with his slingshot, he says to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s and he will give you into our hand.” This God is the God of the historical situation, of the cruel historical demand, of the wars against the Canaanite nations and against the Amalekites. But he is not the tribal God who is there simply to protect the tribe, He is the God of David, the mighty warrior, but also of David the just king and the compassionate man who will not destroy Saul, who seeks his life, even when twice he has him in his hand. He is the God of the Psalmist who prays for protection and even for revenge. “O daughter of Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!” But he is also the God who says, “Vengeance is mine”—the God who “Will abundantly pardon, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.” (Isaiah 55:7-8)

This is the God of the covenant—the covenant between Israel and God through which Israel accepts the task that makes it a people—the task of becoming “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” the task of realizing justice, righteousness, and loving-kindness in genuine communal life, the task of making real the

* Martin Buber, “Autobiographical Fragments,” trans. by Maurice Friedman in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, volume of *The Library of Living Philosophers*, Maurice Friedman and Paul A. Schilpp, editors, New York: Tudor Press, 1961.

kingship of God in every sphere—the personal, the social, the economic, the political, the international, as well as the cultic and the specifically religious. He is the God of the historical demand, but he is also the God of compassion whose covenant of peace shall not be removed from man, the Holy one who dwells in the high and holy place “and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit.” He is the God of Israel, but he is also the God whose house is a house of prayer for all peoples. “In that day,” says Isaiah, (19:24) “Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.’”

On Israel, or on the holy remnant of Israel who remain faithful to the Covenant, is laid the task of initiating the kingdom of God, but the kingdom itself will only come into being when all nations have come to Zion to receive the law. “How do the nations so furiously contend?” says the Psalmist. “The nations rage, the kingdoms totter, God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. . . . He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, he burns the chariots with fire! ‘Be still, and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations.’” (Psalm 46) If the wars of David stand at the beginning of the Covenant, it is the descendant of David—the true king who will lead the people back to the task of making real the kingship of God—who will judge the poor with righteousness, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. It is the descendant of David who shall usher in Isaiah’s “peaceable kingdom.” “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid . . . and a little child shall lead them. . . . They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11:4-9)

The realization of the kingship of God, means the realization of peace. Conversely, Isaiah’s great vision of peace coincides with his vision of the fulfillment of the covenant, when all nations shall flow to the mountain of the house of the Lord that He may teach them his ways and they may walk in his paths:

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem,
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide for many peoples;
And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

(Isaiah 2:2-4)

Isaiah's "universalism" is not an alternative to the task of the people but a continuation of it. His vision of peace is an integral part of the historical covenant between God and Israel, an integral address from God to the people in a new historical situation. The God who speaks is not the God who guarantees a universal moral order but the God of the Ten Commandments whose "Thou shalt" is apprehended by the individual person and by the group only in the unique and concrete situation, the ever-renewed demand of the ever-renewed present.

THE COVENANT OF PEACE

Out of the Biblical covenant grows the covenant of peace. The covenant of peace is not only Isaiah's vision of peace "at the end of days." It is the comfort that God gives man now, "the very present help in time of trouble." It is *emuna*, that unconditional trust that enables the man of the Bible to enter into the new historical situation without guarantees or security and yet know that there too he will meet his "cruel and kind Lord." "The mind stayed on Thee Thou keepest in perfect peace," says Isaiah, and adds, because he trusts in Thee. This is "a peace that passeth understanding," but it is not a peace beyond history and daily life. The Biblical covenant of peace is not a consolation at the end of history or an eternity above it: it is an integral part of history, of the tension between present and future, the dialectic between comfort and demand.

A peace witness based on the covenant of peace cannot be an "absolute" pacifism, accordingly, for in history there is no room for absolutes. "You believe in faith and love," one kindly Friend

remarked to me. "Are not these absolutes?" "No," I responded. "These are relations to the Absolute. The only Absolute is God." For the Bible and for the man of Biblical faith, any absolute other than God is idolatry and any pretense on the part of man to rest his life on "absolute" ideals is a denial both of his situation as a creature in history and of the word of God that may come to him in that situation. Even the Ten Commandments are not universal norms, but, as their language clearly attests, a dialogue between the "I" of God and the "Thou" of man in which man learns in each situation anew what is asked of him. They do not say, "*One* must not kill," but "*Thou* shalt not kill." They do not impose this command on man as a universal prescription to be applied to particular situations but speak it into the concrete situation of each man in such a way that both the word of command and the response of the person commanded is really new and unique.

Absolutes have to do with a "morality" abstracted from the total situation in which any moral conflict arises: the situation of a person facing other persons and called on to act in relation to those persons. The absolutist in so far as he is one in practice as well as theory, acts unilaterally and monologically. He knows what is right *a priori*, before he reaches the situation, and this means that his action is not a true response to the situation but something imposed on it. The absolutist thinks he is being uncompromising and true to his ideal when, in fact, he is simply not responding to what is asked of him. For what is asked of him is not the perfection of his own soul or the moral purity of his actions but the most adequate response possible in a situation which, just because it is human, is always in need of redemption and never entirely redeemable. This is the old quarrel between Plato and Isaiah. Plato's philosopher king is so identified with "The Good" that he may safely impose his single consciousness upon all men of the state, holding them in submission through royal myths and royal lies, knowing better than they do what is best for them since only he knows the Good. Similarly T. S. Eliot's Thomas à Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral* alone knows what is right in the drama in which he is the central character, the only real actor, and his own spokesman while priests, knights, and the ignorant women of Canterbury are

alike in the dark about the true nature of the objective divine design. In contrast to this, Isaiah's vision of peace is no utopia abstracted from the historical situation but is itself a demand placed upon man in history, a dialogue between God and man. It does not necessitate leaving the concrete world—the world of Plato's cave—in order to reach some timeless absolute, but believes that reality can be met in the "lived concrete." Plato, and the absolutist after him, sets a timeless ideal that history is supposed to approach. The result of such an ideal, however, is all too often a dualism between "is" and "ought," real and ideal. The very existence of the ideal becomes the excuse to dissociate oneself entirely from the actual state, as Plato recommends that his philosopher should do since, as he rightly recognizes, the philosopher never will be king nor the king philosopher. Or, as with the absolute pacifist and the absolute social-actionist, it becomes a temptation to impose the truth on the situation in such a way as to recognize neither the possibilities of the situation nor the need for communication with those actually involved in the situation.

"In our present world situation I must insist on the absolute," a young pacifist remarked to me. "Otherwise we shall be weak at the very point where we need to be strong. All the pressures are from the opposite direction. Someone must take an uncompromising stand." These words awakened immediate sympathy in me, and all the more since he had just finished serving six months in prison for his beliefs. They reminded me too of my own feeling that I could not wait until pacifism became a politically feasible position to take my stand as a conscientious objector, that some people had to stand uncompromisingly against war even if, as my Veterans of Foreign Wars uncle assured me, they were "a thousand years ahead of their time." For all that, I would in all seriousness urge the Biblical covenant with the Absolute as against the absolutist's approach to the ideal.

This covenant implies risk—one *responds* without certainty as to the results. It also implies trust—the trust that if one responds as best one may, *this* will be the work that one can perform toward establishing the covenant of peace. And it implies humility—the humility which says I cannot take on myself

the remodeling of the world according to some great blueprint or even the armchair administration of the United Nations. This is not asked of me, and this is not my task. What I can do is to make real that portion of existence that is given to me—including the political, but not the political alone. "One cannot simply build community when the world is about to be blown up," my young friend protested. He is quite right. Yet are we really in a position to prevent the world from being blown up? And if it is to be blown up, is it not better that meanwhile we have created something real and positive? The peacemaker "is God's fellow worker," writes Buber. We make peace not by conciliatory words and humane projects, however, but through making peace "wherever we are destined and summoned to do so: in the active life of our own community and in that aspect of it which can actively help determine its relationship to another community."

If the present crisis leads us to succumb to the merely political, we shall have reinforced the mistrust between nations that makes them deal with each other not in social or human terms but in terms of political abstractions and catchwords. "Our work is for education," one of the young leaders of an organized protest against atomic bombs said to me. If this is so, then this work cannot afford to be purely political, purely external. It must start, like Montgomery, Alabama, from some organic base. It must build on social reality and find its roots in the community already there. It must be concerned about real communication with the people whom it approaches. For the distinction between education and propaganda does not lie in whether one is a communist or a pacifist but in whether one approaches another wishing to impose one's truth on him or whether one cares enough for him to enter into dialogue with him, see the situation from his point of view, and communicate what truth one has to communicate to him within that dialogue. Sometimes that dialogue can only mean standing one's ground in opposition to him, witnessing for what one believes in the face of his hostile rejection of it. Yet it can never mean being unconcerned for how he sees it or careless of the validity of his standing where he does. We must confirm him even as we oppose him, not in his error but in his right to oppose us, in his

existence as a human being whom we value even in opposing.

"One absolute surely stands," this second young man remarked, "and that is that nonviolence is the way to solve conflict." No, even this absolute cannot stand. Even this absolute reveals itself as an idol—a pseudo-absolute—as soon as we look at it carefully. Nonviolence claims too much, and it claims too little. To claim that nonviolence is possible in every situation is to ignore the most obvious facts of personal and social existence. How often even a literal turning of the other cheek masks a violence we cannot extirpate, no matter how we suppress it! How often a tiny word, or gesture, or facial expression betrays the latent violence in a relation between persons where each is trying with all his might to act positively toward the other! And in social and international relations it is no different. The congealed violence that lies just beneath the surface in so much family life, civic administration, government administration, the "cold war" that has been the dominant note in international relations ever since the Second World War, give glaring evidence of how much the alternatives "violent" and "nonviolent" falsify the concrete situation. One can no more know that one will be completely nonviolent in a given situation than one can know that one will love—really love in genuine caring and response—every person one meets or that one will meet every temptation with Kierkegaard's "purity of heart that wills one thing—the good in truth." We do not know our resources in advance of the situation which calls them out of us, the situation to which we respond. What is more, our insistence that we shall deal with every situation in a nonviolent way may actually limit our resources by curtailing our open awareness of what is asked of us and our readiness to respond from the depths with the spontaneity of the whole being.

On the other hand, nonviolence also says too little. One may be nonviolent and still be monological, offering one's answers to others without first listening to their questions. One may be nonviolent and still be the propagandist imposing one's truth on people with whom one does not care to communicate as persons, placing political abstractions above social realities. One may use nonviolence as a technique divorced from the laying hold of truth of

Gandhi's *satyagraha*. One may use nonviolence without dialogue and without love. Nonviolence, in fact, may be, and sometimes is, covert violence, congealed violence, suppressed violence, apocalyptic rage, perfectionist intolerance. It *need* not be these things. It is not these things in a Gandhi or an A. J. Muste. But that is because in them nonviolence is grounded in personal existence and in genuine relation to other persons, rather than objectified into an omniscient technique.

MODERN BIBLICAL MORALITY

There is thus a morality which is both modern and Biblical. This is not the morality of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor—the morality of compulsory order and compulsory good—but neither is it the morality of the Christ of that legend—the morality of a freely given love which places no demand, which does not ask that man authenticate his existence by becoming genuinely human, a morality which does not demand that man bring his inner feeling and his outer social behavior into one unity but leaves him split in two. It is not the morality of absolute pacifism and liberal perfectionism—it is not the morality of any “ism” at all, but of the concrete historical situation. Yet neither is it the morality of those who make the moral demand relevant to “immoral society” only as a judgment but not as a call to “drive the plowshare of the normative into the hard soil of political fact.” It is not the morality of easy choice but of tragic contradiction and of the reconciliation which grows only out of the soil of that contradiction.

I know of no better illustration of this modern Biblical morality than a public letter which Martin Buber wrote to Gandhi in 1939. Gandhi, in December 1938, criticized the Jews for settling in Palestine, an Arab country, rather than keeping Palestine only as an ideal within their hearts. In his reply Buber pointed out that the Jews cannot be responsible without experiencing from the side of the Arabs what it means for the Jews to have settled in Palestine, but neither can they give up their own claim based on their historical task. “I belong to a group of people,” wrote Buber, “who from the time when Britain conquered Palestine, have not ceased to strive for the concluding of a genuine peace between

Jew and Arab"—the Ichud (Unity) Association for Jewish-Arab rapprochement.

By a genuine peace we inferred and still infer that both peoples should together develop the land without the one imposing its will on the other. . . . We considered it a fundamental point that in this case two vital claims are opposed to each other, two claims of a different nature and a different origin, which cannot be pitted one against the other, and between which no objective decision can be made as to which is just or unjust. We consider it our duty to understand and to honour the claim which is opposed to ours and to endeavour to reconcile both claims. . . . Where there is faith and love a solution may be found even to what appears to be a tragic contradiction. (*Pointing the Way*, p. 143)

Gandhi suggested in the same statement that the Jews in Germany use *satyagraha* as the most effective reply to Nazi atrocities. Buber pointed out, in reply, that pure spirituality divorced from the concrete, martyrdom without a ground to stand on, protest when there is no way for the protest to be organized and to be heard, is futile and ineffective as a means of political or social action. In the years since he wrote this letter Buber has continued to insist that the Jews live *with* the Arabs in Palestine and not just *next* to them and to warn that the way must be like the goal, that the humanity of our existence begins just here where we become responsible to the concrete situation by saying: "We shall do no more injustice than we must to live," and by drawing the "demarcation line" in each hour anew in fear and trembling. Modern Biblical morality, between man and man and between nation and nation, means dialogue.

RECONCILIATION

Dialogue means the meeting with the other person, the other group, the other people—a meeting that confirms it in its otherness yet does not deny oneself and the ground on which one stands. The choice is not *between* oneself and the other, nor is there some objective ground to which one can rise above the facing sides, the conflicting claims. Rather genuine dialogue is at

once a confirmation of togetherness *and* of otherness, and the acceptance of the fact that one cannot rise above that situation. It is the living embodiment of the Biblical creation in which man is really free yet remains bound in relation with God. "In a genuine dialogue," writes Buber, "each of the partners, even when he stands in opposition to the other, heeds, affirms, and confirms his opponent as an existing other. Only so can conflict certainly not be eliminated from the world, but be humanly arbitrated and led towards its overcoming."

During three years of work as Chairman of the American Friends of Ichud, I was again and again surprised to encounter among men of good will, including men working for reconciliation of the conflict, either an attitude which simply did not take into account the real problems to be reconciled, one that saw these problems from one point of view only, or one that proceeded from some pseudo-objective, quasi-universal point of view above the conflict. All too often, the word "reconciliation" becomes associated with a sentimental good will that looks away from the very conflict that is to be reconciled, or assumes that, with this or that action or approach a tragic situation can be transformed into a harmonious one. Genuine reconciliation must begin with a fully realistic and fully honest recognition of real differences and points of conflict, and it must move from this recognition to the task of discovering the standpoint from which some real meeting may take place, a meeting which will include *both* of the conflicting points of view.

If we look once more at Buber's reply to Gandhi, we find an example of what seems to me true reconciliation. Buber does not content himself with placing the claim of the Jews in opposition to Gandhi's statement that Palestine belongs to the Arabs and that it is "wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs." He also goes on to recognize the validity and full seriousness of the Arab claim and reaffirms once again what has been the essence of his teaching on Zionism over a period of fifty years—that Zion must be built with justice. This is the necessary first step toward reconciliation—the recognition of the real claims, the real

differences of interest, of each side. The second step is the realistic recognition of the difficulties of reconciling these claims, between which no objective arbitration is possible, and the third is seeking new and creative ways of reconciliation.

UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE BOMB

Self-preservation, the self-understood basic principle of the modern nation-state, no longer has much meaning in a world where self-preservation means total domination or total annihilation. The way is hid in darkness, and even appeals for the return of moral sensibility, such as that of C. Wright Mills,* do not grasp our real situation. We are morally insensible because we are morally and in every other sense overwhelmed. The cold war, the pervasive mistrust, the atom and hydrogen bombs, the intercontinental ballistic missiles, the rockets and satellites, the pseudo-disarmament conferences and the jockeying for world position—all these make mockery of our categories of moral or defensive war, and they threaten to make mockery of morality itself. What statesman could justify the entrance into war in our day as an action in any remote sense calculated to preserve the integrity of his nation or even the lives of its people? Who can take the responsibility for starting or engaging in a “contained” and “local” war—a limited defensive retaliation—and say that it will not lead to total war and total annihilation? “The human world,” wrote Buber in 1952, “is today, as never before, split into two camps, each of which understands the other as the embodiment of falsehood and itself as the embodiment of truth.” Even the attempts at communication in the United Nations or between the great powers directly can hardly lead to any amelioration of this situation so long as the reproaches which one side hurls against the other are “smeared over and crusted with the varnish of political fictitiousness.” Enmeshed in the political machinery, we cannot possibly penetrate to the genuine concrete, the actual life of actual men. “Enclosed in the sphere of the exclusively political, we can find no means to relieve the present situ-

* *Nation*, March 8, 1958, pp. 199-202.

ation; its 'natural end' is the technically perfect suicide of the human race."*

America has been shocked awake by the Russian sputnik, but only to an awareness of the need for science and not to any basic questioning of the assumption that the steady and continued militarization of the total national life is the best means to national safety or world peace. Conscription and the cold war are the environment in which the young men of this generation have grown up, and their ministers, priests, and rabbis serve a turn as military chaplains, occupying the dubious and paradoxical position of serving the nation through serving God. How many young men in an age such as this can seriously consider becoming conscientious objectors or even imagine the moral ground on which one could stand to take such a position? Preparedness for war is called preparedness for peace by our government while in fact, as well as in official pronouncements, the distinction between war and peace has lost much of its meaning. Young men have to live in this "cold war" world. How can they also stand outside it and place a moral judgment on it? How can any of us stand outside of this world of competitive militarism since it permeates every aspect of our lives and bounds it at its far horizons? "The spokesmen of each side say they know that war is obsolete as a means of any policy save mutual annihilation," writes C. Wright Mills, "yet they search for peace by military means and in doing so, they succeed in accumulating ever new perils. Moreover, they have obscured this fact by their dogmatic adherence to violence as the only way of doing away with violence." These words seem to me the simple, incontrovertible facts of our situation.

Yet Mills seems to think only in political terms—unilateral disarmament, "realistic pacifism"—and his call for a new moral imagination is calculated to lead in this direction. This is a confusion of the problem of the morality of war. We cannot ask, is war moral or immoral. We have to ask immoral for whom? And we have to ask, as he does not, what do we mean by moral?

* Martin Buber, *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, edited and translated by Maurice Friedman (Harper, 1957), "Hope for This Hour" and "Abstract and Concrete."

I cannot imagine any sense of the term moral in which one could suggest that total annihilation of the human race is moral, and I cannot imagine any modern war that would not, give or take a billion, involve the risk of such annihilation. I would not hesitate to say, therefore, that war—war as we know it, war as we can only dimly and horrifiedly imagine it—is immoral, for whoever is thinking of the question and from whatever moral point of view one takes. But I do not think we have accomplished very much by saying this. It would be hard to find many serious persons who would disagree with this statement, including all the rulers of all the nations of the world. If every Christian minister and every Jewish rabbi in America thundered from their pulpits that war is immoral, this would not essentially change our present situation—though it might awaken us to its terror.

Moral for whom? Moral for the absolute or in terms of some absolute, timeless morality apprehended by Plato's philosopher king? I cannot think in such terms. I do not see how any serious and responsible person can regard our present situation as merely a special instance of some general condition for which adequate moral rules already exist. Moral for the United Nations? No one can stand outside the United Nations and make objective moral decision, for none of us lives in the universal: we are all part of one nation or the other. Moral for our government? Here we may indeed make a judgment *as citizens* but not as statesmen, nor can this judgment be in terms of some morality detached from the practical situation, some way of assuaging our consciences while bowing to *Realpolitik*. In the end therefore, I must answer the question from my own standpoint, as a unique person in a unique situation, as a member of my family and religious group, as a member of my nation, as a member of mankind. But always from the personal vantage-point which is the only one, in fact, where I stand. Our real responsibility is not making moral judgments from some superior perspective, but responding to the claim of the present situation.

If I ask what is the claim of the present historical situation on *us*, on America my country and on all of us as citizens of this country, I must answer: a great deal more than the politicians,

who think in purely political terms, are willing to face. They cannot see sputnik as a judgment against a country which, in Max Lerner's phrase, has become a "success"—a country which has no "plumb line" to judge it other than its own values, a country which has occupied the stage as *the* world power but must now, more seriously than before, take into consideration the real existence of the "other"—the other civilization, culture, values, political power. This hostile "other" threatens our very existence, yet a positive relationship to it is the only way in which we can continue to exist as a nation, both in the physical and moral sense.

MEANS AND ENDS RECONSIDERED

I came to my position as a conscientious objector through the belief that only good means will lead to good ends. I still believe this—but in a radically modified sense. A "good end" I would define neither as merely social and political welfare nor as inner spiritual perfection, but as the good that is created again and again in lived relations between persons, within and between groups. Justice cannot be based on the personal or the interhuman alone, yet justice remains only a name for the interests of the state or a mere formality until it is concretized and realized in the interhuman sphere. Peace, too, is only an abstraction unless it means a genuine peace based on real community and relations between communities. A "good means" I would define as the whole of the present situation as it leads into the future, and this situation includes all that I am. I cannot work with the situation or with myself as an instrument to be manipulated to some good end. I cannot speak of using good means abstracted from my or our actual resources at any moment, and these resources may make the means that are used something far less than purely good. The absolute pacifist who insists on purely good means is sometimes very little different from the communist who says that the end justifies the means: both are moral absolutists who abstract from the concrete present situation, who treat the present as if it merely exists for the future, who think of action in terms of an external definition of it. In the end the purity of the means I use, while not unimportant, is less important than the faithfulness of my and our re-

sponse. Beyond that I can only trust. Biblical *emuna*, the trust that walks with God through the valley of the shadow of death, precludes the calculations of results whereby we glean a false security about a future that no one in fact can anticipate. The word of the Biblical God that addresses man in history is not, "I shall protect you from all danger," but "I shall be there as I shall be there." Faithful response to the demand of the historical situation begins with awareness and responsibility, but it ends with trust. The total situation is never our responsibility, but only what is asked of *us*, and the question of the morality of war begins, and ends, just at this latter point.

This new attitude toward means and ends represents a "narrow ridge" between the two previous attitudes that I held—the social actionism that acts without awareness of the way in which the person affects the action and the mysticism which emphasizes one's inner state of being to the exclusion of serious concern about others. When I circulated petitions or organized meetings at Harvard, I had little concern for the actual persons I was dealing with. In C.P.S. camps I learned, in Lao-Tzu's phrase, that "the way to do is to be," and, in the words of the Gita, that "he who sees the action that is in inaction, the inaction that is in action is wise indeed." But I swung away to the opposite extreme—renouncing all action until I should have achieved that spiritual realization which would make action "effective." Like Cristina in Silone's *Bread and Wine*, I believed that,

The soul that does not know God is a leaf detached from the tree, a single, solitary leaf, that falls to the ground, dries up, and rots. But the soul that is given to God is like a leaf attached to the tree. By means of the vital sap that nourishes it, it communicates with the branches, the trunk, the roots, and the whole earth.

I gave up the work in labor education that I had undertaken during my day off, renounced ordinary sociality and even casual conversation, and set about realizing my spiritual unity with all men through resolutely turning away from them.

My present view of ends and means is thoroughly dialogical. Neither the outer action nor the inner person is essential alone, but

call and the response. Even the "inner light" shares in this dialogue. It is a stirring, a prompting, a leading, that comes in a particular situation and calls for one's active concern. One senses it "within," to be sure, but it exists in the *between*—between a man and the situation that calls to him, between a man and the message or event that "speaks to his condition," between a man and the divine spirit that enters into him and works through him, between a man and the "still small voice" that addresses him from the depths of his conscience.

UNDER THE ETERNAL WINGS

In the world in which we live the tragedy of the contradictions has been increasingly borne in on us, the possibilities of reconciliation seem to have grown fewer and fewer. Yet reconciliation there must be, and we cannot cease, in each new situation, to discover and proclaim what concrete steps may be taken toward some amelioration of conflicts, some first step toward communication, some laying of the ground for future cooperation. The covenant of peace must be carved out of the resistant granite of our own current history. True reconciliation will come, if at all, only on the soil of tragic opposition. We cannot cease to work for it. We cannot fail to do our share as God's partners in the covenant of peace. Though we live under the shadow of the hydrogen bomb, we stand under the cover of the eternal wings.

The mountains may depart and the hills be removed
But my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
And my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
Says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

BOOKS BY MAURICE FRIEDMAN

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MAURICE FRIEDMAN was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921, received an S.B. in Economics from Harvard University in 1942 and spent the next three and a half years in Civilian Public Service camps and units for conscientious objectors. In 1947 he received an M.A. in English from Ohio State University and in

1950 a Ph.D. in History of Culture from The University of Chicago. From 1946 to 1951 he taught English at Ohio State and Friends University, Wichita, Kansas; Humanities in the College of the University of Chicago; Masterpieces of World Literature at Washington University, St. Louis, and Philosophy at Ohio State. He has been Professor of Philosophy at Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York, since 1951, on the faculty of The New School for Social Research in New York City since 1954, and on the faculty of the Washington (D. C.) School of Psychiatry since 1956. He has been Assistant Professor of Religion at Columbia University, Visiting Professor of Religious Philosophy at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Lecturer in the Biblical Covenant and Contemporary Images of Man at Pendle Hill, and Guest Lecturer in "The Image of Man and Psychotherapy" at the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and Psychology in New York City. On sabbatical leave from Sarah Lawrence during the academic year 1959-60, Maurice Friedman and his wife Eugenia spent the fall at Pendle Hill as Resident Fellows, and from January to September 1960 in Israel and Europe on a grant from the Littauer Foundation for work on a book on the image of man in Melville, Dostoevsky, Kafka, and Camus.

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